Kitchen Waste Composting With Worms

Why Worms?
Worms are the animal kingdom’s master composters of kitchen waste, turning it into a rich high-quality compost for your garden. In King County, it’s recommended that kitchen waste be buried and covered by at least 8” of soil, or composted in a worm bin. Worms bins are an efficient and fun way to recycle food wastes into compost that can improve your garden soil.

Choose a container
Use a sturdy box (either wooden or plastic) with a tight-fitting lid to keep pests out and moisture in. A shallow box about a foot deep is best as worms live near the surface in order to breathe. You need about one square foot of surface area for each pound of kitchen waste. For outdoor bins, drill holes in the bottom for drainage. For indoor bins, drill holes on the sides and be sure liquid doesn’t accumulate in the bottom. To buy a ready-made worm bin, see resources on this sheet.

Add bedding
Shredded newspaper, corrugated cardboard, coarse sawdust or dry leaves make good bedding. Moisten first by soaking; then squeeze water out and fill the container to the top. Add more bedding when the contents seem too wet, or to cover food waste if fruit flies appear.

Add worms
Red wriggler worms thrive on organic materials such as kitchen waste. Don’t use earthworms or nightcrawlers as they live in soil and don’t eat kitchen waste. A starter batch of a pound or two can come from a friend’s worm bin, or see resources on this sheet. Worms like to stay between 59°-77° F though they can handle temperatures between 33°-86° F. Shelter outdoor bins from hot sun and cold nights.

Add kitchen waste
Feed your worms vegetable and fruit remains, coffee and tea grounds and filters, moldy bread, grains and cereals. Cut scraps into small (one-inch) pieces for softer digestion and faster composting. Don’t feed them meat, dairy products, fats, oils, non-biodegradable materials or pet wastes. Within your bin, rotate locations of food distribution. Even distribution speeds up the composting process.

Harvest the compost
In a month or two, remove the finished castings and change the bedding. Too many castings can be toxic to the worms. Two ways to remove compost and leave the worms:

Push the crumbly castings (compost) to one side. Place new bedding in the empty side and add new food scraps. As the worms finish in the old side, they’ll move to the fresh bedding side and you can remove the finished compost.

Pile the compost in the sun. Worms don’t like the light and in a few minutes will move below the surface. Scrape off the top layer. Wait 5 – 10 minutes and repeat the process until you have a pile of mostly worms that can be returned to the worm bin to get back to work.

Additional Resources for Worm Composting
• Build your own bin  www.kingcounty.gov/soils
• The Garden Hotline 206-633-0224 or email help@gardenhotline.org
• Worm Digest. For people in the business or who want to start www.wormdigest.org
• Gardening in Western Washington http://gardening.wsu.edu
• Worms East My Garbage by Mary Appelhof. Available at local bookstores and libraries.
Resources for Worm Bins and Worms

This list should not be construed as an endorsement.

Auburn Sports and Marine
253-833-1440
810 Auburn Way N, Auburn
http://auburnsportsmarineinc.com/
sys-tmpl/door
Occasionally stocks worms. Call first.

Minter’s Earlington Greenhouse
425-255-7744
13043 Renton Ave S, Renton
www.mintersnursery.com
Worms available mid-March

Sky Nursery
206-546-4851
18528 Aurora Ave N, Shoreline
www.skynursery.com
Worms, worm bins and accessories. Carries most composting items.

Stone Way Hardware
206-545-6910
4318 Stone Way N, Seattle
Worms. Will ship via mail/UPS.

The Red Worm Gals
Bellevue, WA
206-501-8844
Worms and Worm Bins

Yelm Earthworms and Castings Farm
14741 Lawrence Lake Rd SE, Yelm
877-339-6767 (toll free) or 360-894-070
www.yelmworms.com
Worm bins, compost, worm castings, Will ship via mail/UPS

Download more information on Natural Yard Care and soil building at www.kingcounty.gov/soils. Click on Documents.